

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES OF EUROPE

Resolution 163 (2003)¹ on the role of territorial authorities in the management of river basins

The Congress, bearing in mind the proposal of the Chamber of Regions,

1. Having considered:

a. the report on “The role of territorial authorities in the management of river basins: an analysis of the Danube based on the experience of the Rhine” presented by Mr Dragnea (Teleorman, Romania) and Mrs Jacobs (Gelderland, the Netherlands), rapporteurs;

b. the Final Declaration of the European Conference on the Role of Territorial Authorities in the Management of River Basins – the Danube, held in Turnu Magurele (Romania) from 10 to 12 April 2003;

2. Recognising the increased responsibility placed on local and regional authorities by international agreements (Bonn 2001, Johannesburg 2002), European Union policy (EU Water Framework Directive, 2000), and the decentralisation of many key elements of water management in central and eastern European countries;

3. Welcoming this increased responsibility for water resource management as it reflects the fundamental human right to water and allows for this right to be protected by local and regional authorities which are the most direct form of representation of the needs and expectations of citizens;

4. Welcoming this increased responsibility, as it is in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government and reinforced by the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD);

5. Recalling the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention), which entered into force November 2001, through which European governments committed themselves to ensuring active public involvement in decisions related to water and recourse to justice for victims of poor management;

6. Aware that the management of local and regional water and wastewater services, and local compliance with environmental standards and requirements on the part of agriculture, industry and construction, which are frequently the direct responsibility of local and regional authorities,

have a direct and significant impact on water quality and environmental health of the entire basin in question;

7. Aware also that just as local and regional actions can have transboundary impact, cross-border co-operation can help solve local problems;

8. Confirming full commitment to: the non-discriminatory and universal provision of basic water and wastewater services to the public; the involvement of the public and all stakeholders in decision making; co-operation with other levels of government authority, national and regional institutions and commissions, and all nations and regions within a shared basin to ensure integrated water resource management;

9. Affirming full commitment to the provisions and requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive and stressing the important role of local and regional authorities in achieving them in accordance with nationally and regionally agreed timeframes;

10. Concerned that there is an urgent need for local and regional authorities (in central and eastern Europe) to strengthen their:

a. democratic and participatory processes for planning and implementing water management strategies;

b. institutional capacity and human, technical and financial resources in order to carry out a crucial role in water management;

c. enforcement, compliance and regulation capabilities;

d. co-operation between regions and municipalities within and across state borders;

e. position and participation in national, European and basin-level decision making, assessments and agreements which directly affect them and their constituents,

11. Calls on local and regional authorities in all member states of the Council of Europe to:

a. become more proactive and engage in ongoing dialogue concerning integrated transboundary water resource management;

b. further their efforts to increase transparency, provide access to information, be responsive to and encourage public participation, and build trust and confidence within their communities;

c. ensure optimal use of available funds through increased efficiency, development of low-cost solutions, enforcement of the “polluter pays” principle, prioritisation of funds to areas of greatest need, and integrated management keeping in mind relevant basin-wide strategies;

d. keep themselves informed and up to date regarding changes in legislation, European and basin policy, new techniques and the environmental status of their watercourse;

e. launch public information campaigns which highlight the direct links between domestic, agricultural and industrial consumption and waste and the health of the environment, as well as the reasons and economics behind the region's water pricing system, in order to foster "demand management" of water resources and appreciation of each individual's role in preserving the health of the river basin;

f. hold regular public hearings or fora where civil society, industry, agriculture, the private sector and all stakeholders can openly discuss their concerns and demands for water;

g. identify a contact point for water resource management and inform neighbouring regions and national government;

h. develop a system for emergency warning of citizens, central authorities and neighbouring regions in the case of emergencies such as floods, dam bursts and dangerous pollution;

12. Calls on local and regional authorities in the Danube river basin to:

a. use the opportunity of the application of the EU Water Framework Directive to engage more actively in water resource management at the basin and sub-catchment level;

b. participate in the process of demarcating sub-catchment boundaries, developing integrated basin strategies, and co-operating with regions with which they directly share water;

13. Calls on local and regional authorities in transboundary river basins in the European Union, in particular the Rhine basin, which is of comparable size and level of challenge as the Danube to:

a. contribute to the process of EU enlargement by making available and actively sharing their experience, expertise and technologies with their counterparts in the Danube and other central and eastern European basins, through arranging training workshops, site visits, exchanges of experts, joint initiatives and partnerships;

b. support the establishment of the centre for local and regional authorities in the Danube river basin, in Turnu Magurele (Romania), which as a pilot project, will be a specialised structure for all local and regional authorities of the Danube river basin, with the task of co-operating with the relevant institutions and international structures responsible for the management of natural resources, and initiating and monitoring specific projects;

c. support the initiative "Education for the Danube River", which will be launched in the framework of the UN International Year of Freshwater 2003, as defined in the Final Declaration of the European Conference on

the Role of Territorial Authorities in the Management of River Basins – the Danube, held in Turnu Magurele (10 to 12 April 2003), set out in the appendix to the present resolution;

d. promote the establishment of a European network to bring together the international and major river management authorities in member countries as mentioned in the Turnu Magurele Final Declaration.

Appendix

European Conference on the Role of Territorial Authorities in the Management of River Basins – the Danube, Turnu Magurele (Romania) from 10 to 12 April 2003

Final Declaration

1. Approximately 120 participants from twenty member countries of the Council of Europe attended the European Conference on the Role of Territorial Authorities in the Management of River Basins – the Danube, held in Turnu Magurele, Romania, from 10 to 12 April 2003;

2. The conference was organised by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) in co-operation with Teleorman county council and the province of Gelderland (the Netherlands).

3. The conference themes, illustrated by a number of case studies, were:

– the legal framework of water management and the Water Framework Directive;

– local and regional authorities tackling water/river management and inter-regional co-operation;

– the environmental aspects of river management;

– tourism transport and economy in river basins: an integrated approach;

– the Danube Delta and the Teleorman region projects;

4. The conference constituted a significant element in the work programme of the CLRAE for 2003 and, in particular, as a step in the preparation of a report, accompanied by a resolution and a recommendation on the role of territorial authorities in the management of river basins to be presented to the Plenary Session of the CLRAE in May 2003;

5. Following their discussions, the participants:

6. Wish to thank the host authorities of Turnu Magurele for having conceived and organised the conference;

Concerning governance

7. Conscious of the need to promote the principles of democracy and the maintenance of European and global values,

8. Reaffirm the place of local and regional authorities in the process of decision making at national and European level and the importance of a coherent and effective application of the principles of administrative decentralisation and local autonomy;

9. Consider necessary a higher degree of co-operation of local and regional authorities with national authorities in carrying out action programmes for water management;

10. Consider it important to inform citizens and strengthen public participation in river and water management, thus increasing legitimacy, fostering acceptance and efficiency;

Concerning the environment and water

11. Express their support for all international agreements, conventions and bilateral treaties in favour of sustainable development;

12. Underline the role and responsibilities of local and regional authorities in Europe for the environment;

13. Recognising the role of national and international non-governmental organisations in raising awareness about the environment, tackling environmental problems and promoting co-operation,

14. Recognise the efforts and activities at international, European and national level for ensuring the security and quality of natural resources and, in particular, water;

15. Underline the importance of policies for ensuring the provision of drinking water of a satisfactory quality and quantity and stress that the poor quality of drinking water has harmful effects on health, particularly for young people;

Concerning the Danube

16. Consider that the basin of Danube river and its tributaries are of enormous economic and social importance as a major European river system with multiple uses and functions, providing drinking water, transport, energy, fish and numerous sources of income and recreation to millions of people, as well as being of great ecological significance as the natural habitat for countless species and location of several wetlands;

17. Express their concern about the declining quality of water in the Danube river basin and the continuing deterioration of natural habitats and wetlands;

18. Convinced that the successful management of the Danube river basin is a European challenge, currently and after European Union enlargement, requiring a co-ordinated and sustained effort by governments, regional and local authorities, specialised agencies, commissions and relevant NGOs;

19. Bearing in mind the importance of the natural capital represented by the Danube basin in maintaining ecological

balance and as a key element in the associated socio-economic systems, which have a direct impact on living conditions in the region;

20. Conscious of the need to encourage the tourist potential of all communities in the Danube river basin;

21. Recalling the historic differences between the riparian countries of the Danube river basin and that citizens involvement can only be effective if they enjoy a basic level in their standard of living;

22. Consider that there is an urgent need for joint action, with the upstream countries assuming their responsibilities in relation to the worsening situation of the Danube river basin;

Concerning international co-operation

23. Welcome the work of the International Commission for the Danube River Protection in developing a joint action programme, the promotion of co-operation and furthering a co-ordinated plan for the Danube basin;

24. Encourage the further development of a coherent management of navigation and transport of international rivers through appropriate bodies, whilst maintaining a balance with environmental considerations;

25. Consider that while the Danube basin, with its riparian countries at different levels of economic and political development, is unique, the experiences of local and regional authorities in other major European waterways, in particular those of the Rhine basin which have had long practice in democratic, decentralised and integrated transboundary water resource management, are invaluable;

26. Approve and welcome the co-operation in this respect which has developed between the province of Gelderland in the Netherlands and Teleorman county council in Romania; and encourages the development of further examples of such co-operation;

Concerning the European Union

27. Affirm that the Water Framework Directive 2000/60/CE of the European Union not only marks a significant step forward in the formulation of a European water policy but is also a valid legal reference instrument for the achievement of co-operation between local, regional and national authorities for the management of the Danube river basin;

28. Encourage the commitment of Danube river basin countries to the common objectives and targets of the Water Framework Directive;

29. Welcome European Union financial support for regional development and environmental improvement in the Danube river basin and asks that this support be

strengthened in view of the enormous natural capital, economic prospects and tourism potential of the Danube basin;

30. Welcome the invitation of the Committee of the Regions of the EU for consultation of representatives of territorial authorities from Bulgaria and Romania;

In respect of local and regional authorities:

31. Recommend:

32. Representatives of local and regional authorities from all riparian countries of the Danube river basin be closely involved in the activities of specialised institutions, organisations, working groups and agencies, such as: the European Commission, the Danube Commission, the Dablas Task Force, etc;

33. A centre for local and regional authorities in the Danube river basin be established, which as a pilot project, will be a specialist structure for all local and regional authorities from the Danube river basin, with the task of co-operating with the relevant institutions and international structures responsible for the management of natural resources and initiating and monitoring particular concrete projects;

34. Such a centre be established in Turnu Magurele following the invitation extended by Teleorman county council;

35. This new centre organise regular meetings, for example four times a year, with the participation of representatives of local authority associations in the Danube river basin, the results of which shall be sent to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, to the Committee of Regions and the Commission of the European Union;

36. Local and regional authorities be asked to participate in working groups dealing with the establishment of funding programmes and that such funding should be directed so as to ensure sound and sustainable development and improvement of the natural capital of the Danube river basin;

37. Recommend furthermore that:

38. A special fund be established – Danubius – in order to attain a European standard regarding the safety and access to water resources for all citizens of the Danube river basin given that the pre-accession finance available for water provision and sewage infrastructure is insufficient, in the light of the increased demand arising from local authorities within the area;

39. An initiative “Education for the Danube River” be launched, in the context of the UN International Year of Freshwater 2003, an initiative aimed at:

– raising awareness amongst local and regional authorities in the Danube river basin about the importance of water as a component of the natural capital;

– the increase of the participation of riparian communities in the decision-making process;

– dissemination of information and experience on ecological questions;

40. A starting point for the above initiative could be the project entitled “European Environmental Youth Platform” established by Teleorman county council in co-operation with Teleorman county high school;

41. Ask the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) to:

42. Promote the establishment of a European network to bring together the international and major river management authorities in member countries with the aim of:

– encouraging contact and co-operation, with a view to creating synergy between international organisations, national, regional and local authorities and specialised commissions on questions of water and river management;

– strengthening the role of local and regional authorities in the management of river basins;

– fostering partnerships for the management of river basins;

– encouraging exchange of information and experience, for example through the creation of an Internet site on river basin management;

43. Consider the organisation, in co-operation with the European Union – particularly its Committee of the Regions – of a conference/seminar on water management in the Rhine and Danube basins, with other interested river basins, to explore, inter alia, the establishment of practical projects for co-operation;

44. Strengthen co-operation between territorial authorities bordering the Black Sea, given its close interrelationship with water quality and other problems of the Danube basin and similarly to strengthen co-operation between territorial authorities in the Adriatic Sea region and its associated river basins;

45. Ask the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to:

– encourage member governments of the Council of Europe to put into practice the relevant recommendations adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe;²

– give a positive response to the proposal made by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for a European Charter for the Danube Basin as a structure for co-operation in the region;

– encourage member countries of the Danube river basin to include possibilities for transfrontier regional co-operation within their relevant intergovernmental agreements;

46. Ask the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (Cemat) to examine closely the proposals contained in the final declaration with a view to their implementation and seek to strengthen co-operation and synergy between the Cemat and the CLRAE;

47. Take into account the results of the current conference and final declaration in its future work, particularly in the context of the follow-up to be given to the report on the role of territorial authorities in the management of river basins (rapporteurs: Mrs Jacobs (Netherlands) and Mr Dragnea (Romania)).

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Regions on 21 May 2003 and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 22 May 2003 (see Document CPR (10) 4, draft resolution presented by Mrs C. W. Jacobs and Mr L. N. Dragnea, rapporteurs).

2. – Rec. 9/1995 on the 6th European Conference of Frontier Regions (Ljubljana, Slovenia, 13-15 October 1994);
– Rec. 19/1996 on aspects of urban policies in Europe;

– Rec. 22/1996 on the European Charter of Regional Self-Government;

– Rec. 41/1998 on new prospects for regional/spatial planning policy in greater Europe;

– Rec. 57/1999 on local and regional economic instruments for the environment;

– Rec. 72/2000 containing an opinion on the “guiding principles for sustainable spatial development of the European continent”, in preparation for the 12th European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning in Hanover;

– Rec. 74/2000 on the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe: specific projects on local democracy and transfrontier co-operation;

– Rec. 85/2000 on democratic stability through transfrontier co-operation in Europe;

– Rec. 99/2001 on international co-operation at regional level;

– Rec. 100/2001 on management of transboundary water resources in Europe strengthening the capacity of territorial authorities for a co-operation and sustainable integrated management;

– Rec. 101/2001 on the impact of globalisation on regions;

– Rec. 108/2002 on local authorities confronting natural disasters and emergencies.